

Amendments to the Specification

Please amend the Specification on page 7, paragraphs 2 and 3, as follows:

~~FIG. 6 is a chart~~ FIGS. 6A-6C are charts illustrating the underwriting logic of the preferred embodiment.

~~FIG. 7 is a chart~~ FIGS. 7A and 7B are charts illustrating the retirement plan design logic of the preferred embodiment.

Please amend the Specification, last paragraph on page 7 and ending on page 8, as follows:

The preferred embodiment utilizes traditional Internet Web-based architecture. FIG. 1 illustrates the logical architecture of the preferred embodiment in a functional block diagram. The Web site system 10 provides various functionality for designing and marketing group retirement plans. Web server 12 is connected to a computer network, such as the Internet 14. Other computer networks suitable for use with the present invention include, but are not limited to, ~~a LAN, a WAN~~ Local Area Network (LAN), a Wide Area Network (WAN), an Intranet, and an Extranet. A plurality of end-user data processing systems 16 with Web browsers 18 are connected to the Internet 14. Web browsers 18 are client software programs based upon ~~HTTP (Hyper-Text Transfer Protocol)~~ Hyper-Text-Transfer-Protocol (HTTP) compatible products, such as Netscape Navigator, JAVA Browser or Microsoft Internet Explorer. Web pages and Web application software ~~20~~ are loaded on a storage medium ~~[[20]]~~ accessible to the Web Server 12. Retirement plan data and plan sponsor data is stored on a storage medium database (DB) 22 serviced by a database server 24. The precise operating systems and hardware configurations of the database server 24, Web server 12, and Web browsers 18 are not limited to any specific hardware or software configuration. These systems can be implemented on a wide variety of hardware and software platforms.

Please amend the Specification, page 8, second full paragraph as follows:

As described briefly above, the Web site system 10 includes software and Web pages that implement the design and sale of group retirement plans. ~~FIGS. 2-4~~ illustrate the operation and logic of the system in a procedural flow chart. Referring to FIG. 2, the process begins at steps

[[28, 30]]28 and 30 when a prospective plan sponsor visits the Web site. The prospect's Web browser 18 through the Internet 14 communicates with the Web server 12 during this session.

Please amend the Specification, the last paragraph on page 8 and ending on page 9 as follows:

At step 32 the prospect enters eligibility information about the prospect's business into an electronic template. Information is gathered necessary to determine whether the prospect qualifies to purchase an annuity contract and to design and adopt a 401(k) plan through the Web site 10. For example, the financial services provider could decide to offer the Web site service only to organizations having less than 100 plan participants and who are committed to using a totally electronic 401(k) plan. The appropriate questions can then be asked to screen potential plan sponsors for the Web site service. Of course, requirements for eligibility will vary from one financial services provider to another, depending on the segment of the market targeted. However, in addition to basic contact information, responses to the following list of questions have been found helpful in determining whether a particular prospect qualifies:

Please amend the Specification on page 10, all three paragraphs, as follows:

~~FIG. 6 illustrates~~ FIGS. 6A-6C illustrate the logic in determining whether the prospect qualifies at step 34 (referring to FIG. 2) based upon responses to the questions set forth above. The underwriting criteria or questions are provided in column 36, the possible responses in column 38, and impact of the possible responses in column 40. For instance, if the prospect/plan sponsor is a governmental agency, it would not qualify. Instead, the prospect would be referred elsewhere in the company for service. As another example, the prospect would not qualify to use the Web site service if it employed more than 1,000 people. These are examples only. Of course, the methods and systems disclosed as part of the preferred embodiment could be easily adapted to include governmental agencies and organizations having more than 1,000 people.

~~FIG. 6 provides~~ FIGS. 6A-6C provide logic behind the underwriting criteria. In the preferred embodiment, this logic is intended to identify small to medium sized plan sponsors who are, among other things, committed to an electronic plan administration system. Again, the screening or underwriting criteria can be easily modified by the financial services provider as necessary.

Based upon the rules and logic described above (referring to FIG. 2), a determination is made at step 34 as to whether the prospect is a match for or qualifies to use the Web site service. If the prospect is not a match for the service, then the prospect is referred to another part of the company (steps [[42, 44]]42 and 44). If the prospect is a match, then the prospect proceeds to "sign on" to the Web site at step 46. The prospect provides a user name and personal identification number (PIN) when signing on for the first time. The user name and PIN has several purposes. First, information entered about the plan sponsor can be saved and easily accessed later should the prospect leave the Web site before purchasing a plan. Second, requiring a user name and PIN provides a level of security for the private data which will be required to set up the plan design, contract application and service application. Further, the user name and PIN can constitute an electronic signature for executing documents.

Please amend the Specification, the last paragraph on page 12 and ending on page 13, as follows:

~~FIG. 7 shows~~ FIGS. 7A and 7B show the logic for determining plan rules concerning ~~participant-employee~~ eligibility and ~~participant~~ contributions, including the amount of the contributions and a vesting schedule. The characteristics driving the need for a retirement plan (answer to question #2 above) are shown in column 52, the plan sponsor contribution plan provisions are in column 54, and ~~participant-employee~~ eligibility provisions are in column 56. To illustrate one possible scenario, if the prospect identified as reasons for setting up a plan "to attract new employees" and "to retain existing employees" (see FIG. [[7]]7A, row 1) then the system would recommend that the employer provide a 50% matching contribution up to 4% of the employee's annual compensation. In addition, the system would recommend a six-year graded vesting schedule and that employees be eligible to participate upon hire. As another illustration, if the business drivers are "to compensate higher-paid employees" and "to reduce tax liability" (see FIG. [[7]]7B, row 6), the system would still recommend a 50% matching contribution up to 4% of the employee's salary. However, the employer's contributions would immediately vest, and an integrated profit sharing contribution would also be provided. Further, the prospect would be given the option to select either "immediate entry" or "one year with 1,000 hours and age 21" with respect to employee or ~~participant~~ eligibility.

Please amend the Specification, page 13, first two full paragraphs, as follows:

As for whether loans are offered under the plan, this is dictated by the prospect's answer to the loan question (#3) above. The system could easily be modified to also ask the prospect whether an objective is to provide ~~participants-employees~~ access to their accounts before retirement, such as through hardship or in-service withdrawals.

Next, the recommended plan rules or provisions are returned to the prospect's Web browser 18 at step 58 (see FIG. 3). At this point, the prospect can review the recommended plan rules and any alternative plan rules available through the system. For instance, the system may recommend a six-year vesting schedule, but also present the prospect with alternative vesting schedules. If the prospect selects an alternative plan ~~[[rule]]~~rules at step 60, then the system displays the business consequences of the ~~change-modified~~ at step 62. For example, if the prospect selects a longer vesting schedule, the system would inform the prospect as to the potential negative impact in attracting new hires.

Please amend the Specification, page 14, second paragraph, as follows:

Next, the system begins building the ~~actual-plan contract by first querying~~gathering contract information from the prospect ~~for more information~~ at step 70, particularly information necessary to prepare an application for a retirement plan contract. Such information may include the full legal name of the plan sponsor, the employer identification number (EIN), date of incorporation/establishment, standard industry code (SIC), person with legal authority to bind the plan sponsor, and the frequency of contributions (e.g., weekly, monthly). The prospect reviews and approves the contract information at steps 72 and 74, respectively.

Please amend the Specification, page 15, first two full paragraphs, as follows:

The system also generates and transmits a service agreement in electronic form to the prospect at steps 79 and 80, respectively. The prospect electronically signs the service agreement and the same is received on the system at step 81. The same process is repeated for the adoption of a plan document at steps ~~[[.]]~~ 82-84.

The process ends at steps 85~~[[.]]~~and 86 with receipt of an application fee, preferably by means of an electronic funds transfer (EFT).

Please amend the Specification, page 15, fifth full paragraph, as follows:

As shown in the flow chart in FIG. 5, business driver information is ~~selected~~collected for investments from the prospective plan sponsor at step 88. In a preferred embodiment, the prospect is asked one or more of the following questions at step 88:

Please amend the Specification, page 17, third and fourth full paragraphs, as follows:

Those skilled in the art will appreciate that the functionality described above can be implemented using Hypertext Mark-Up Language (HTML)~~HTML~~ pages in combination with other software, such as JAVA or JAVA applets.

FIGS. 8-11 are illustrations of a Web browser 18 see FIG. 1 displaying representative Web pages of the preferred embodiment. In specific, FIG. 8 shows a Web page for collecting information from the prospect for underwriting/eligibility purposes. FIG. 9 is an exemplary sign on page. The Web page shown in FIG. 10 is intended for gathering design plan information from the prospect. Finally, the Web page shown in FIG. 11 is an example of recommended plan rules presented to the prospect for review. Note that the particular plan provisions in FIG. 11 are shown in drop-down boxes. The other entries in the drop-down boxes are alternative plan provisions. These Web pages are exemplary only, and can be customized as necessary for a particular application. Those skilled in the art to which the invention pertains will recognize alternative ways of collecting and presenting information.